

Militias aim to shed their KKK image

America's armed 'patriot' groups claim they are reasonable people.
 Ambrose Evans-Pritchard looks at their mission to nail real terrorists

IN A bizarre turn of events, the patriot militia movement in the United States has launched a campaign to hunt down neo-Nazis and bring them to justice for alleged acts of terrorism.

The militias claim that they have been falsely linked to the wave of bombings in the US over the past two years, especially the Oklahoma blast that killed 168 people in April 1995. A number of their leaders have set out to prove that the real culprits are members of the white supremacist underground — a network of fascist cells committed to the overthrow of the constitutional order.

"Imagine what it felt like to be a militia guy when everybody started saying the militia blew up that building in Oklahoma," said Mike Vanderboegh, an activist in one of the Alabama militia groups. "We've got to dispel

this idea that we're terrorists, or that we're the Ku Klux Klan reborn."

It is believed that the militia movement has continued to grow since the Oklahoma bombing, although part of it has disappeared from sight in a strategy of "leaderless resistance". The Southern Poverty Law Centre, which tracks the militia movement, estimates membership at about 100,000, of which 10,000 are "hard-core".

Vanderboegh, a warehouse manager in Montgomery, goes by the title of Brevet Colonel in the "1st Alabama Cavalry Regiment". "We're light cavalry," he explained, laughing. "We've got a platoon of dirt-bikes, and a team of ultra-lights [aircraft] for scouting."

Like a number of militia leaders, he was an activist in the anti-war movement in the Sixties. "I was a Leftist

back in my callow youth, a Maoist actually," he said. "I remember cheering when we pulled out of Saigon. Then I learned about the re-education camps and the killing fields, and that's when I started to change."

Over the past seven months, he has been publishing a newsletter on the Internet called the *John Doe II Times*, a compilation of press cuttings and documents that accuse the US government of suppressing the full truth about the Oklahoma bombing. "John Doe II" was the mystery man seen with the chief suspect in the bombing, Tim McVeigh, when he rented the Ryder truck that was allegedly used for the attack.

The FBI conducted a massive manhunt for John Doe II in 1995. Then, the Justice Department suddenly announced that there was no John Doe II after all. It had



Target: Michael Brescia is named in the militia campaign

all been a big mistake. McVeigh acted alone on the day of the crime.

The problem is that a large number of witnesses saw other men with McVeigh on the morning of the crime in Oklahoma City, and at critical times before that in Junction City, Kansas, and Tulsa. Several have identified one man as Michael Brescia, a neo-Nazi with ties to a para-

trated by an informant. A documentary on ABC television's *20/20* last week brought forward compelling evidence that the government had advance knowledge of the bombing.

Brescia now lives at his parents' house in Philadelphia. Last weekend, on a freezing winter's day, the militia mounted an operation to expose him and to rebuke the Justice Department. "Someone's got to do this," said the commander, Arlin Adams. "If nobody makes the effort, the system will fail."

The team darted from one telegraph post to another fixing posters of Michael Brescia outside his house, at his family's church, and at the University of La Salle, where he is finishing a degree in finance. The posters bore the message, "Unwanted by the FBI" and showed Brescia's picture next to a police sketch of John Doe II.

Adams, 41, is the co-ordinator of "1 Psy-Ops Company of the Southeastern Command". He is a far cry from the militia stereotype of an

overweight gun-nut prancing through the woods in camouflage gear. A soft-spoken intellectual, he is working on a doctorate in psychology. He served for 12 years in US military intelligence. His expertise is in tactical intelligence operations, according to his discharge form.

"The white supremacists are exceedingly dangerous," he said. "What they're trying to do is provoke government repression against the militias, hoping to exploit anarchy to tear away territory for a neo-Nazi state. These racists don't care how many people they kill; they're quite prepared to use biological and chemical weapons."

In the fight against neo-Nazi terrorism, some militias find themselves in the same camp as the Jewish Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Centre, organisations that have denounced the militia movement in the past. The Anti-Defamation League is not yet willing to embrace the likes of Vanderboegh and Adams as comrades in

the struggle against racism, but it no longer regards the militias as public enemy number one. In its latest report, "Danger: Extremism", the ADL has downgraded the militia threat and is careful not to lump together libertarian activists and the Ku Klux Klan.

The emergence of a spontaneous militia movement involving 100,000 people, in the world's only superpower, is one of the most stunning cultural developments of the post-Cold War era. Caught off-guard, the US media fell for clichés about "black helicopters" and were deceived into thinking that deranged radio hosts such as Mark Koehn epitomised the movement.

It is now clear that the militias are a civic network of Americans with a high degree of political awareness, resisting the apathy and lassitude of an atomised, television society. One day, perhaps, historians will come to regard some of them as better people than their critics.